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Review of *Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works* by Leslie A. Duram

Edward (Ted) Carey

Department of Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreation Resources, Kansas State University

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Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works. By Leslie A. Duram. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xii + 250 pp. Table, map, photographs, appendix, references, index. \$21.95 paper.

As an extension vegetable specialist with a strong interest in organic farming and in assisting farmers to make a living, I relished this book. Leslie Duram is a geographer at Southern Illinois University Carbondale who has her roots in Kansas and is motivated by a love for Plains agriculture. The book, which she describes as a piece of advocacy scholarship, is at once scholarly, informative, and entertaining. In six well-organized chapters Duram provides an overview of organic farming within the context of overall U.S. agriculture and society (with our growing demand for organic food), reviews research describing organic farms and farmers, presents and analyzes the stories of five successful organic family farms, and offers a vision of a future American agriculture based on medium-sized organic family farms.

The introductory chapters provide thoroughly referenced background for the engrossing heart of the book—the stories of five successful organic farms, as told by the farmers through extracts from interviews conducted by the author over a number of years. Located in New York, Florida, Illinois, Colorado and California, the farms represent a diverse array of production and marketing schemes reflective of their regions. Two (California and New York) are vegetable farms that wholesale and market directly, one (Florida) produces citrus, one (Illinois) direct markets meats and other products, and one (eastern Colorado) sells organic grain on the global market. Most of the farmers made the transition to organic and are continuously striving to improve their production and marketing systems. Through the interviews, Duram

captures their enthusiasm, motivations, and challenges. She then analyzes convergent themes (economic, ecological, societal, and personal) to describe organic agriculture and suggest strategies for enhancing its success.

The author's choice to focus on middle-sized family farms is welcome, since it is these that were once the backbone of U.S. agriculture and in recent years have been the most threatened with extinction. Each of the farms profiled has worked hard to develop successful marketing and production strategies. The author warns, however, of the danger industrial-scale "Big O Ag" poses to the future success of organic family farms. In the final chapter Duram suggests ways to ensure that family farms play an increasing role in meeting growing consumer demand for organic food. Her suggestions include increased support

for organic research, careful protection of organic standards, and the creation of a "Fair Share" label certifying that farmers get a fair share of the price that consumers pay. She also emphasizes the need for an enlightened and supportive consumer population demanding locally and regionally grown organic food.

Certainly there will be proponents of large-scale conventional and organic agriculture who will reject the author's proposals out of hand and who may take the time to attempt to rebut her assertions through scholarship and advocacy. I hope they will do so, for *Good Growing* should be widely read and discussed as we seek to ensure a viable future for our family farmers. **Edward (Ted) Carey**, *Department of Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreation Resources, Kansas State University.*